

'Giant of environmental concern' devouring projects

From staff reports

LAS VEGAS, Nev. — Environmental concerns are like a giant ravenously devouring potential golf course projects, and they must be dealt with actively, aggressively — and internationally — architects feel.

Speaking at the International Golf Course Conference and Show, architects Brian Silva, Roger Rulewich and J. Michael Poellot expressed concern about a pervasive lack of knowledge among regulators concerning the impact of golf courses on the environment.

"The depth and extent of lack of understanding so far as fertilizers and pesticides are concerned, are exemplified by the people who cry relative to golf course-induced pollution ... involving surface water in the Northeast," said Silva, of Cornish and Silva in Massachusetts. "As any elementary soil text will attest, phosphate pollution of surface waters is largely the result of erosion... Under the consistent cover of turf, and considering the phosphate-fixing potential of acidic soils, it would seem that this form of pollution from golf courses in the Northeast is unique at best. Yet it's (a claim) that we face in every single project.

"This speaks to the need to better educate state and local permitting authorities."

Saying that proving a negative — that a golf course won't adversely affect the environment — is always difficult, Silva said: "We in the industry have been a bit negligent in ... getting our points across relative to golf and the environment. It's helped to create a sleeping giant attitude.

"The giant of environmental concerns is awake and ravenously hungry. He is eating potential golf course projects and soon he is going to turn his attention to existing courses as well. We really have to get together and take an active, aggressive approach to the problem."

Silva said each and every project's permitting process is affected by other projects, whether it involves soil loss and erosion, impacts associated with golf course construction and maintenance, or potential for surface and ground water pollution.

Rulewich, the senior designer for Robert Trent Jones Sr. in New Jersey, said architects are "working in a gray area most of the time" in regards to the environment.

Careful site selection is crucial, he said, adding that when environmental issues are involved, oftentimes "the client needs deep pockets ... and the ability to carry on or walk away."

Rulewich said basic ingredients for a site have always been terrain, soils, and the water supply. "But today we need to know more than that. We need to look beyond them..."

"Other considerations are not so apparent or visible. Even if there are no apparent physical problems

within the bounds of the property, you have to consider the community around it. You must look at zoning, taxes, public water supply, sewage treatment, power, and the impact the development will have on the town around it, from roads to schools. Local ordinances cover everything from archaeological preservation to building and road specifications, slope restrictions, noise and traffic controls..."

While myriad organizations outside golf get involved in these projects, Silva called on those in

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— J. Michael Poellot
golf course architect

golf to work to be "environmental activists in the best sense of the term."

The effect of their efforts will not be confined to the United States, according to Poellot.

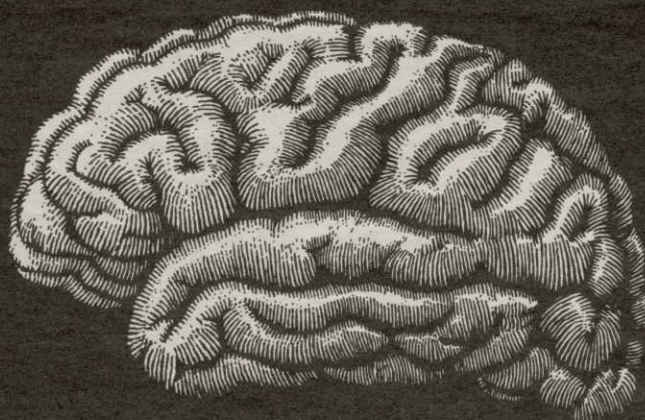
Poellot, who works extensively

in Southeast Asia and Europe, said, "An environmental concern anywhere is an environmental concern everywhere. It is imperative we work to improve and to share any improvement internationally."

"Golf has become an international game. It is inevitable that golf course issues found in the United States will soon surface around the world," he said. "Almost every golf course in the world is part of this worldwide network, whether they like it or not."

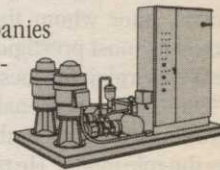
After all is said about the impact of golf courses on the environment, Poellot said, for every course developed today, turning 150 to 160 acres into lush land, "there are 5,000 acres being paved in asphalt, never to see the sun again."

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